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ABSTRACT

Educational institutions throughout the world have established various non-traditional, or non-university, forms of postsecondary education to accommodate people who are past the age of compulsory schooling and who are not served by traditional universities. These institutions may be compared and contrasted to community colleges in the United States in terms of their mission and policy, programs and services, and governance and control. Occupational related studies, for instance, are prominent in a majority of these non-traditional educational institutions. Japan's junior colleges provide a useful comparative example in that they are terminal education institutions providing general, short-term postsecondary education and differ significantly from their U.S. counterparts in admissions policy, governance, and control. Despite differences, key challenges face many community colleges around the world, including articulation; developing comprehensive exit examinations; supplying necessary remedial courses; deciding how much emphasis to place on community services; high graduate unemployment rates; and issues of social equality. Finally, many other countries that do not have comparable institutions are faced with the need to implement community colleges or similar institutions, such as in Australia which is experiencing a high demand for skill-based programs. The expansion of the community college sector appears certain because of the world-wide demand for a variety of non-university educational services at a reasonable cost by people who are past the age of compulsory schooling. (TGI)

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Digest

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Community Colleges International

by Florence B. Brawer

The community college is an educational institution unique to the United States. Other educational systems throughout the world have established various non-traditional forms of education, or non-university institutions, to accommodate people who are past the age of compulsory schooling and who are not served by the traditional universities. These non-traditional educational institutions are similar to community colleges in several ways. One way in which non-university institutions around the world mirror community colleges is in the services they provide and the individuals they accommodate. People in other countries who take advantage of alternative forms of education generally seek a range of opportunities not available through traditional avenues, including prebaccalaureate studies, access to jobs, cultural education, and recurrent education. In the United States, community colleges developed in response to similar needs of students and, thus, accommodate people who are past the age of compulsory schooling and who are not served by the traditional four-year institutions. This Digest describes various types of institutions successfully operating in different countries that can be likened to community colleges, and highlights points of commonality and difference.

Types of Community Colleges Around the World

Besides the United States, Asia and Europe are regions of the world where non-traditional alternatives to post-compulsory education are fairly well developed. A variety of names identify these institutions--examples include, community colleges; junior colleges; technical, teknologi, or technological institutions; district or regional colleges; colleges of further or advanced education; fachhochschulen or folk high schools; higher schools; workers' colleges; and short-cycle institutions. For the purposes of this essay, the term community colleges will be used to describe these types of alternative post-compulsory educational institutions in other countries, unless otherwise specified.

According to Cohen (1995), while none of these non-traditional educational institutions offer the baccalaureate, considerable variation exists in their functions. Prominent in the majority of non-university higher education systems and community college type institutions around the world are occupationally related studies. For example, Sweden's upper secondary schools integrate general subjects with vocational training in a workplace-based setting. The regional technical college system in Ireland, the special training schools in Japan, and China's junior colleges similarly emphasize vocational courses. In nations where the universities are unable to matriculate all degree seekers, like the United States and Canada, prebaccalaureate programs predominate. And, in Australia, Britain, Denmark, Germany, and Norway lifelong learning and cultural education are emphasized (Cohen, 1995).

Organizational patterns also vary among and between these non-traditional institutions in different countries. Unlike the United States where state coordinated higher education systems are prevalent and include non-university educational institutions such as community colleges, short-cycle postsecondary programs in Austria, Denmark, Indonesia, and Sweden, are considered part of the secondary school system. In South America, community colleges are more likely to function as branches of polytechnic colleges. And, New Zealand's system links its community colleges with the country's polytechnic and technical institutes (Kintzer, 1990). Norway's short-cycle programs are conducted through district colleges, Israel's through regional colleges, and Germany's through Fachhochschulen, which are nationally coordinated. Canada is unique in that community colleges are governed by a system separate from the rest of the higher education system.

The Junior College in Japan: A Comparative Example

Japan's community colleges are more aptly called junior colleges because they provide general post-secondary education of short duration. However, compared to community colleges in the United States where transfer education is a major function, Japanese colleges are terminal education institutions, granting certificates and preparing students for state licensing. Also, the open-door admissions policy of community colleges in the United States is not found in the Japanese junior colleges. Japanese colleges reject 50 percent of the applicants on the basis of high school grades or low entrance examination scores. Further, it should be noted that Japan's college student population is fairly homogeneous, consisting of recent secondary school graduates, in contrast to the large body of adult and continuing education students attending community colleges in the United States.

Another difference between junior colleges in Japan and community colleges in the United States pertains to governance and control. Although Japanese institutions are under the control of the government, they are primarily financed through tuition, with the government providing for barely 20 percent of their costs. Also, Japanese colleges are directly responsible to the National Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture. This is quite different from the local boards that manage the internal affairs of American community colleges (Harada, 1993).

In addition to the divergence between Japanese junior colleges and U.S. community colleges, other countries offer

examples of differences between institutions. Variety appears in sources of funding, operating mandates, the type of faculty, and in the types of liaisons and collaboration with other organizations in and outside the educational system such as business, industry, and public service organizations (Dennison & Behnke, 1993).

Challenges to Community Colleges in Other Countries

Key issues and challenges face community colleges in many countries around the world. For example, challenges facing Jordan's 52 community colleges, which have been established on concepts directly inherent to the community college system in the United States, are detailed by Al-Tal and others (1993). As reported by Al-Tal, the challenges Jordan's community colleges face include: articulation and the difficulties in promoting transfer; how to develop comprehensive exit examinations that cover any number of courses students may take; what types of remedial courses are needed; how much emphasis to put on community services; and unemployment of community college graduates. Despite these hurdles, Jordan's community colleges are viewed as an investment that ensures both the social prestige and economic security of the country and its people (Badran, 1989).

Community colleges in Israel are grappling with issues different from those Jordan is experiencing. Israeli educators and the public are concerned with the question of whether the 'second-chance' educational programs their community colleges offer succeed in enhancing social equality in education, a problem with which many American community colleges are currently struggling (Ayalon and others, 1992).

The Need for Community Colleges in Other Countries

Some countries are faced with the possible need to institute community colleges or similar institutions into their educational systems. Traditionally, Italian universities have been open to all petitioners; now there is an apparent need for other types of diploma-related, intermediate activities. Britain's expansion of 18 year-olds entering higher education mandates increased two-year diploma programs. It also calls for a breakdown in the barriers between universities and community colleges (Cohen, 1995). And in Australia, the demand is for skill-based programs.

Educational institutions respond to these demands in different ways. For example, Australia responds to the demand for skill-based programs by injecting strong vocational components into the curriculum (Barnett and Wilson, 1994). South Africa's long-term needs for community colleges as a means to redress educational disparities is resolved in the short-term by using existing educational structures to create separate courses or curricula. An interim solution, but one that nonetheless is likely to bring about long-term results (Strydom and others, 1995).

Kintzer (1994) notes that many central and eastern European countries are debating the extension of the non-university concept, with some national policy statements arguing for major reforms. Some reform efforts have already taken place in individual countries. For example, in the Ukraine junior specialist courses are a part of the country's reform efforts. In Belarus, a network of post-diploma courses focusing on commercial cooperatives and intended to upgrade business and entrepreneurial skills have been offered. These courses lasted anywhere from one month to more than one year. And, in Bulgaria, three-year post-secondary schools are being established. Other portions of Eastern Europe are exploring the adaptability of the American community college. Mellander and Mellander (1994) note that Hungarian educational policy makers would like to provide transfer opportunities for students, short-term vocational and occupational training, and life-long learning courses.

Conclusion

As Cohen states, "the world wide expansion of post-compulsory, non-university education will continue as national development, technical changes in the workplace, and rising demand for further education focus on this sector" (1995, p. 73). Changing student populations, labor force demands, and various types of administrative control all demand flexibility on the part of these non-traditional post-secondary educational institutions. More and more, similarities can be found between these institutions and community colleges in the United States. The expansion of the community college sector appears certain because of the world-wide demand for a variety of non-university educational services at a reasonable cost by people who are past the age of compulsory schooling.

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